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Forme e luoghi del culto nell'arco alpino occidentale
dalla preistoria al medioevo

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EARLY MEDIEVAL FUNERARY CHURCHES IN THE CENTRAL-WESTERN MEROVINGIAN ALPINE AREAS: STRATEGIC AND IDEOLOGICAL CHOICES OF THE GERMANIC ARISTOCRACY

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this contribution is to focus on the results of archaeological surveys carried out on the early medieval funerary buildings situated on the central-southern Swiss alpine slope, without examining all the post-classical religious contexts within the western alpine areas, in order to reconstruct a systematic and comprehensive scenario of the ideological decisions reached by the Germanic aristocracy to create a 'memory'. While excavation data are useful for identifying some of the recurring factors involved in selecting the sites to host 'privileged funerary groups', the choices made by the founders (family groups or more extensive communities) may also have been based on variables linked to contingent issues and to the traditions of the specific 'family' never fully 'understood' through the material data (BÖHME 1993, pp. 397-401; 1996, pp. 477-484).

The Germanic élites often chose marginal areas in the extensive Late Antique or early medieval cemeteries created to host communities that, socially, were quite heterogeneous. Economic crises and social transformations in the 4th-5th centuries led to the abandonment of Roman *villae* and to changes in how they were used and, when some areas were reutilised, they were no longer used as living quarters but as grave sites (SPALLA 2012, p. 417).

There are many practical and ideological reasons why this phenomenon became so widespread: the availability of reusable construction material, the natural protection for burials provided by masonry, of which some walls remained intact, and the desire to salvage nodal points of the village, which still offered good visibility, at least for the cases in which the preservation of the *villae*, perhaps limited only to some sectors, was such to make such an operation feasible (fig. 1; MARTI *et al.* 2005, pp. 97-101).

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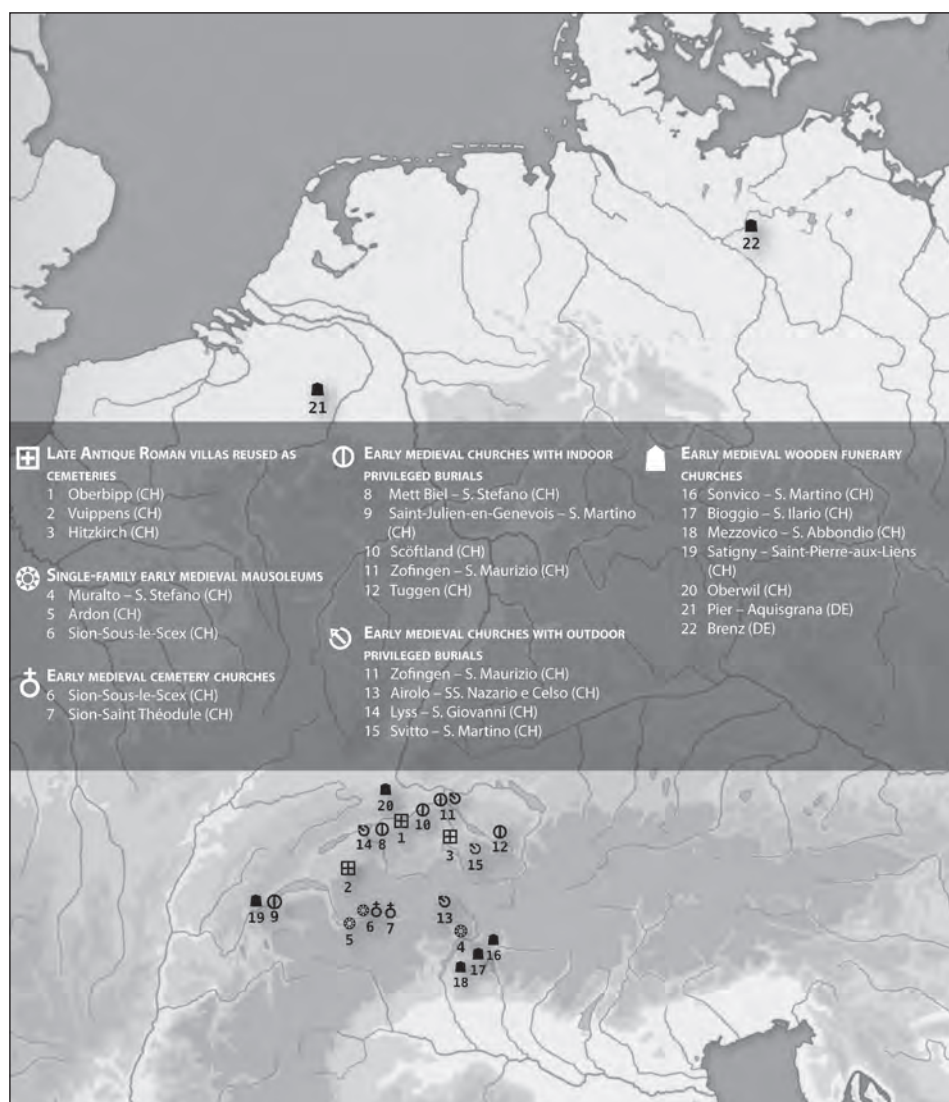


Fig. 1. Position of the sites described in the text classified by type (elaboration Rossana Managlia).

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SETTLEMENTS FROM ‘PLACES OF THE LIVING’ TO ‘PLACES OF THE DEAD’

Based on the excavation data, the funerary complexes that developed on the remains of the rural *villae* in the central-southern Swiss alpine areas evolved into the models described here. In the first case the community’s ‘memory’ was developed through the construction of mausoleums that instead of providing the basis for a new building of worship were limited to simple shelters for burials, perhaps for celebrating strictly private rites and only for the families of the deceased. In

some Late Roman *villae*, located in the Swiss villages of Oberbipp and Vuippens, evidence points to the reuse of living structures as small rooms-mausoleums containing graves datable to the late 5th century. In these cases, however, there is no evidence to infer the presence of mobile altars or material elements for worship and, therefore, whether or not these constructions were also used for liturgical purposes (SENNHAUSER 2001). In the second case, the monumentalization phase developed by reusing rural residential structures, transforming them first into small mausoleums, which occurred quite frequently in the 5th-6th centuries, and then into funerary buildings used throughout the early medieval period to celebrate rites involving a larger community rather than the single original group of *possessores*. To this regard there is quite an interesting sequence traceable to the 7th century in Mett Biel in the church dedicated to S. Stefano (LEHNER 1978, pp. 149-151; VON KAENEL 1978, pp. 138-139; SENNHAUSER 1989). The first church, with a single apse and a rectangular choir, was built on the remains of a mausoleum, for which only the eastern part with funerary functions was preserved in the first construction phase, while the western part, where the mausoleum entrance was located, was demolished. The masonry mausoleum, built probably by the end of the 6th century to contain three burials from the subsequent reconstruction that were never violated, was constructed on top of an older grave that, based on the corner pole holes at a depth of approximately 50 cm discovered at the bottom of the pit and the remains of wooden beams, it may have been surmounted by a 4th-century wooden structure built to contain the body of someone who had not yet been Christianised (LEHNER 1978, pp. 149-150). This highlights an interesting aspect, rarely evidenced in the excavations of religious buildings, in which structures that refer to what are typically Germanic-pagan traditions – graves with a wooden chamber emerging from the ground that reflect a cultural background typical of the Nordic world – and others traceable to the Late Roman traditions, such as the construction of mausoleums, are superimposed on Christian centres of worship (BÖHNER 1964, pp. 657-660; PICARD 1989, pp. 12-13; PILET *et al.* 1990; RETTNER 1992).

In the mid 6th century particular attention was focused on the complex of S. Stefano: indeed, around the middle of the same century, the community of Mett Biel – or perhaps some of its members with blood ties to the earlier grave occupants – built a church on the site of the older mausoleum which, in addition to the first deceased originally buried inside a wooden chamber, contained three other individuals in graves positioned next to walls and marked by what were probably *arcosolia*. A new building was constructed on top of the mausoleum, of which only the western part was demolished, while three burials were dug in the eastern area, which remained intact. After this transformation phase, two other noteworthy

events occurred: firstly, the mausoleum became the church choir, i.e., the point toward which all the faithful faced during the celebrations, and the three burials that it contained now were adjacent to the walls of the presbytery and completely respected and inserted into the new centre of worship (SPALLA 2012, pp. 423-424). Even after these transformations the church of S. Stefano maintained the funerary function role that the site had played for almost three centuries: various graves, that despite the limited artefacts of clothing are all datable to the 7th century, were dug in the space available within the nave.

In the third and final case, funerary churches were built on the remains of a *villa* without any other evidence indicating the presence of mausoleums in the intermediate phases (SPALLA 2012, p. 417). In the Swiss area of Hitzkirch-Lucerna an early medieval graveyard was found on top of the structures of a Late Roman rural dwelling (LUDIN 1984; MARTIN 1988, pp. 89-91; GRAENERT 2005b, p. 152). When a large part



Fig. 2. Early medieval buckles (second half of 5th-first half of 8th century) with elements of the damascened military belt attributed to a Germanic aristocratic male (from WINDLER 2005, p. 201).

of the *villa* had already been abandoned, one of the areas – in all likelihood with walls still intact, adequately preserved and functioning as a warehouse – was transformed, between the end of the 6th century and beginning of the 7th, into a mausoleum containing burials of individuals belonging to at least two generations of the local aristocracy, including adults and children of both sexes and of equal social status, based on the individual items of clothing found in the graves (fig. 2).

In particular, it was possible to identify a set of older graves (graves 34, 37, 38 and 39a),

while two other burials (graves 32 and 39) can be linked to a subsequent phase – even if it is not clear exactly how much time elapsed after the previous one. The grave located in the eastern corner (grave 37) belongs to a young warrior buried with grave goods consisting of a set of very simple weapons (spear tip, knife, arrowhead) and a composite belt, indicating at least a link to Germanic military traditions. The two female burials (graves 34 and 38) contain individuals from a middle-high social level, considering the jewellery buried with them, including glass beads, gold pendants and ‘basket’ ear-rings (LUDIN 1984).

At the same time the area outside the mausoleum was utilised to bury persons who perhaps had ties of kinship, given the presence of adolescents, men and women, which formed at least three other groups located in the southern, western and eastern areas. With all probability this third set of burials – containing at least two graves with male and female garments (graves 36 and 41) – with a different orientation compared to all the others, was influenced by the presence of walls, eliminated following the construction of the church dedicated to S. Pancrazio (after the 8th century), but most likely still existing in this first phase (LUDIN 1984, pp. 224-225). Such data allow us to infer that many mausoleums co-existed in the same centres, with different orientations, but built within the same relatively brief timeframe (MOOSBRUGGER LEU 1971, pp. 28-34; STEIN 1967; SENNHAUSER 1989, pp. 1520-1522).

THE TRANSFORMATION OF MAUSOLEUMS FROM ‘PLACES OF THE DEAD’ TO ‘PLACES OF WORSHIP’

The need to make mausoleums accessible to an ever-increasing community of devotees – along with the desire to celebrate holy rites, presumably for the entire local community, within such structures and next to the graves of ones ancestors – led to a proliferation of small churches adjacent to the mausoleums-rooms transformed into side annexes. To this regard a sequence has been recognised at the church of Saint-Julien-en-Genevois (Geneva) for which the starting point of the entire religious complex might be a rectangular mausoleum dating back to the mid 5th century with a single privileged burial in a central position with a north-south orientation (COLARDELLE 1983, pp. 57-59).

A rectangular church with a single apse and a regular orientation was built at the beginning of the 6th century, next to the mausoleum: the centre of the apsidal sector was the site of a small masonry structure interpreted as providing support for the Holy Communion. In this phase the two parts of the complex (mausoleum and room) were connected through a narrow passage with a funerary function, perhaps closed on the eastern side by a small apse. With such a solution it became possible to establish a link between mausoleum and church and to expand the privileged



Fig. 3. Type of early medieval burials identified: 1 graves with stone slabs, 2 bisomus grave with stones and mortar and wooden cover, 3 grave with irregular stones, 4 grave with squared blocks of tuff (from GRAENERT 2005b, pp. 162-165).

funerary functions between the 7th and 8th centuries must also be evaluated (fig. 3; SPALLA 2012, p. 425).

THE SOCIAL HIERARCHIZATION OF 'PLACES OF THE DEAD'

The arrangement of graves in churches, even taking into account the significant variety due to the availability of space or family choices, often corresponds to precise strategies involving rigorous hierarchies of indoor and outdoor spaces (SPALLA 2012, p. 427). The areas in front or in proximity to altars are recognised as privileged locations, in general reserved for the burials of founders. However, the study of numerous buildings containing important graves has helped to outline a more complex framework with privileged burials identified even in the nave and, in particular, along its central axis, or next to the perimeter walls, or close to the façade walls and on the external

sector for burials of important members of the community, who out of respect for the memory of their ancestors, during the 6th-7th centuries, placed their graves next to the previous ones, that were still the subject of devotion. Numerous graves were dug under the floor of the nave and two of these are of particular interest owing to their position in front of the apsidal sector. The first is male and the second female and are indistinguishable in terms of construction technique since both are made with stone walls and covers. Within this interpretative context the presence of an 'L'-shaped portico with

side of the church near the choir. It can be inferred that there was a close tie between the altar and the graves in front of it, as found in various buildings, and with those situated on its sides (Schöffland, Saint-Julien-en Genevois-S. Martino). It would be interesting to verify the presence of any common elements in the grave goods, or in the type of burials with such close ties to the altars. This would make it possible to establish if a relationship with the graves of the founders is the only pursuable solution, or if instead these burials can be attributed to persons linked to the church by particular forms of devotion and to whom it was permitted, in a similar manner to what was reserved for the most important members of the cleric, to be buried in the holiest areas of the buildings (BOISSAVIT CAMUS - ZADORA RIO 1994, pp. 50-53; SAPIN 1994, pp. 75-77).

In the nave, in particular in its middle sector, aristocratic individuals were often buried with a west-east orientation, almost as if the intention was to have them continue to participate, in an ideal manner, in the liturgical ceremonies. Always in the inner rooms privileged burials positioned along the external walls have been interpreted as containing members of the founding group, for which it would be interesting to evaluate the presence of symbols on the walls, through which to identify the deceased and the specific burial, hence establishing a direct relationship between container and contents. In general, owing to the very poor condition of the masonry, generally found in the foundation, or preserved as walls, but with a limited height, such hypotheses cannot be formulated (SPALLA 2012, p. 429).

In addition to the burials next to the perimeter walls inside the buildings it is also important to consider those external to the buildings, in some cases identified by *arcosolia*, and generally created inside the same brickwork (MEIER 2005, pp. 135-136). In the 7th century in the church of Zofingen-S. Maurizio along the southern side of the structure, two burials were placed side by side and at a short distance from each other. The first and older male grave was built at the beginning of the century and was violated or emptied almost at the same time as the construction of a second grave where a woman was interred, in the mid 7th century. Probably to avoid any future tampering, it was decided to demolish a part of the perimeter wall and to reconstruct it so that the burial could be permanently sealed (fig. 4; HARTMANN 1981, pp. 151-159).

Graves in front of churches, created in proximity to the façade and encompassed in its construction, as well as graves exterior to them, dug on the external side on the main front of the church and therefore as a continuation of its median axis, have been archaeologically confirmed. At Svitto-S. Martino, in a rather extensive cemetery with burials in scattered groups, a female burial dating to the early 8th century was found near the perimeter wall in front of the church, built in a marginal area of the cemetery at the end of the same century. Even if it is not possible to provide evidence that the founders of the religious complex wanted to encompass one



Fig. 4. Zofingen (grave 81), reconstruction of the damascened male belt for hanging weapons (from MOTSCI 2005, p. 329).

or more burials, the position of the grave might make this decision likely (SENNHAUSER 2001, p. 182). It is not clear if the decision to bury outside the churches contrasts with the decisions to locate the burials inside: in the first case it might indicate the intention to demonstrate the bond between the persons buried and the church to all those who passed close to the place of worship, without obliging them to enter, while the indoor burials might reflect a more 'intimate' decision. This second possibility requires other confirmations, including the visibility of the religious buildings and of the funerary groups positioned along the transit ways, something that is not always feasible due to the limited dimensions of archaeological digs.

It is more difficult to identify the exhumations carried out to recompose the remains of the deceased in another location, i.e. transfers decided by the community of the living to modify the place for the 'conservation of memory' (SPALLA 2012, pp. 431-432).

A burial completely emptied of its contents during an unknown period was identified in front of the front wall of the funerary church of Tuggen: this was interpreted as confirming the movement of venerated remains, transferred from the external multiple burial to a space situated along the perpendicular of the inner area. Even though archaeological data do not allow us to confirm such an interpretation, it is still interesting to hypothesise that in the 7th century a family or a community, perhaps that had recently converted to Christianity, as indicated by the hagiographic and historical sources for the area of Tuggen, had commissioned the construction of the church and had one of its members buried there – perhaps someone who had died prior to the conclusion of the construction work and temporarily buried in its vicinity – to then be transferred inside the building (DRACK - MOOSBRUGGER LEU 1960, pp. 180-182; MEIER 2005, pp. 134-136).

In few situations, when building renovation involved the partial destruction of some burials, they were relocated, often enhancing their importance, to new centres (Lyss and Airolo), and the conserved skeletal remains were moved to other graves. Instead, those that remained were adequately strengthened so that the walls of the new buildings that sealed the remains forever could be positioned on top of the covering slab (fig. 5; BÖHME 2008, pp. 31-33; SPALLA 2012, pp. 435-436).

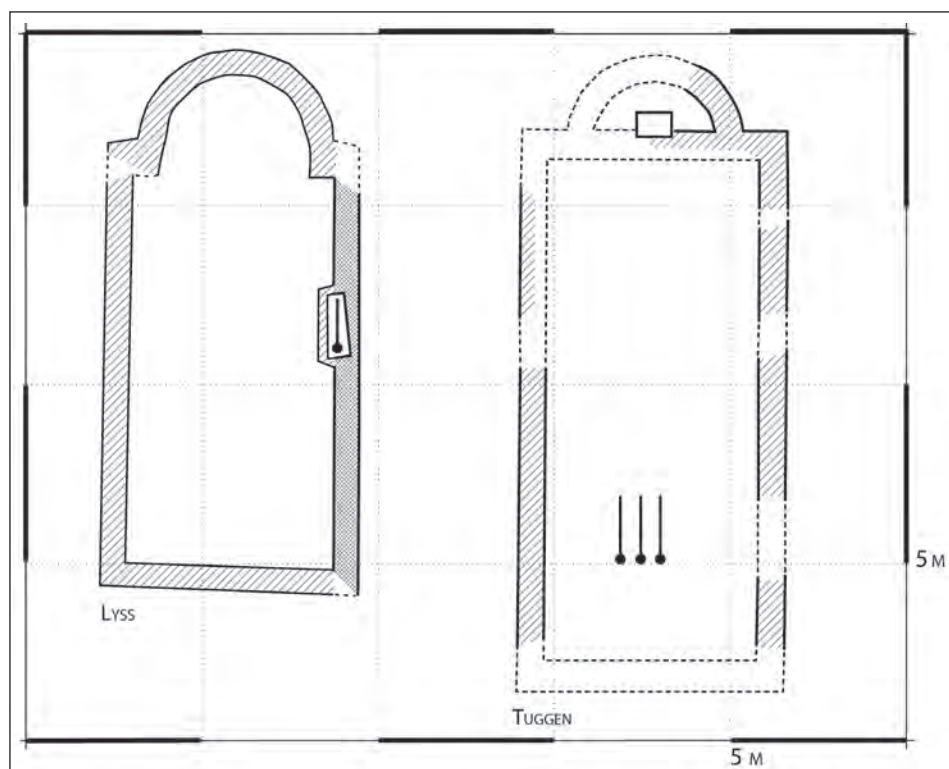


Fig. 5. Plan of the early medieval churches of Lyss and Tuggen with position of the privileged burials (from MEIER 2005, p. 135).

FROM WOODEN CHURCHES TO MASONRY BUILDINGS: FAMILY STRATEGIES OF THE GERMANIC ARISTOCRACIES

Structures built with perishable materials are rather common in this area even if there are some contingent problems in identifying them as religious buildings due to a lack of unambiguous identifying elements that can qualify them as such. In addition, it is of fundamental importance to apply the stratigraphic excavation method to archaeological surveys since, thanks to its operating procedures and techniques, the negative impressions of structures no longer preserved can be identified. Without such a second condition it is nearly impossible to determine the presence of wooden structural remains. In some cases, if documented, it becomes difficult to attribute the burials to the initial phase or to the following one with the transformation of the wooden structural part into masonry work – often the two buildings are divided by a rather brief time interval – and it becomes complicated to establish if the older church had also carried out a funerary function or was only a liturgical site (DE MARCHI 2001; BROGIOLO 2002, p. 10). Such structures have been identified in the geographic area of Ticino at Sonvico-S. Martino, Bioggio-S. Ilario and Mezzovico-S. Abbondio including

a building in Bioggio-S. Ilario, interpreted as a wooden church, with walls supported by poles sunk into the ground, that delimited a rectangular room divided by a fence along two thirds of its length, to which a brickwork apse was added prior to the 8th century (fig. 6; SENNHAUSER 1994; DE MARCHI 2001; JAGGI 2005, p. 140).

Using wood as a construction material cannot be considered an indicator of poor economic investment to create places of worship linked to personal graves or to those of family members, nor a confirmation that the founders belonged to a lower social class. The church of Sonvico-S. Martino contains a marble altar consisting of a small column with a cylindrical trunk and a capital with palmettes surmounted by a shelf that confirms the funerary reuse of a Roman funerary stele. If indeed there is a link between this wooden building and a female grave discovered a short distance away, with an East-West orientation and a head niche to the East – originally accom-

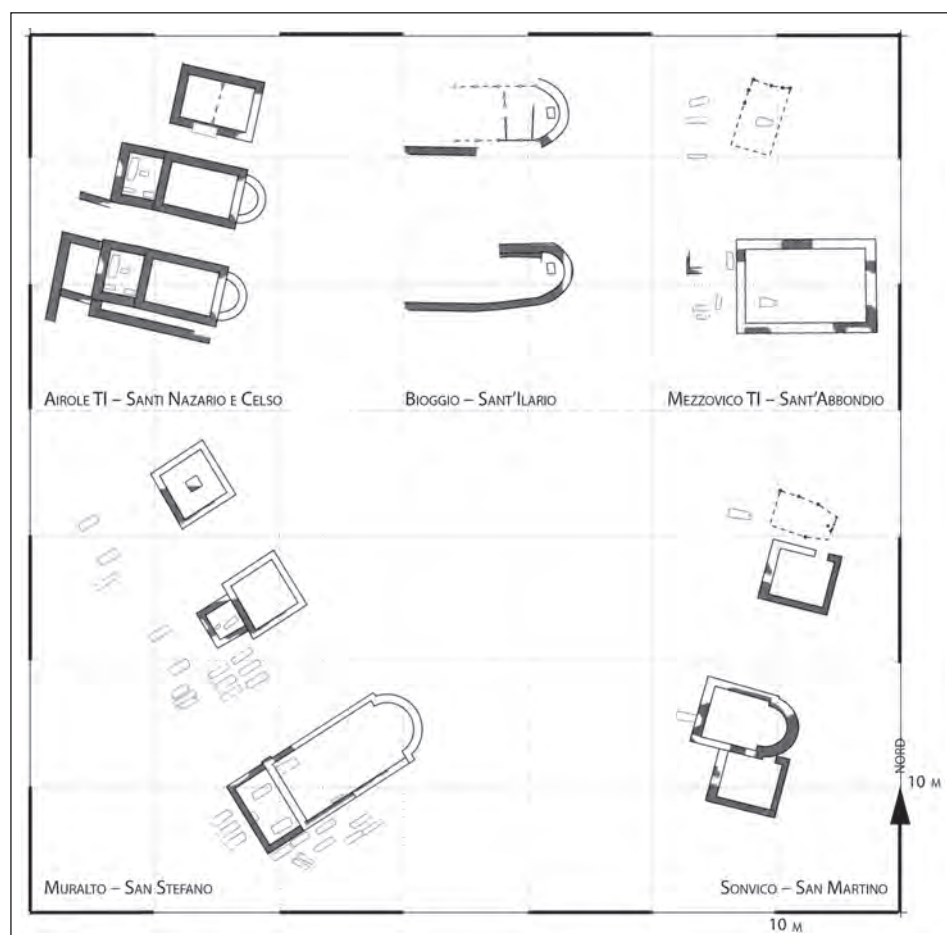


Fig. 6. Plan of the early medieval churches of Airole, Bioggio, Mezzovico, Muralto, Sonvico (from JAGGI 2005, p. 141).

panied by elements of the individual garments subsequently dispersed because of the reuse of the burial in the 9th century – then we find ourselves in the presence of an all wood liturgical and funerary environment, associated to an aristocratic burial, and used for at least a century up to the construction of the masonry church in the mid 8th century (DE MARCHI 2001; SENNHAUSER 2003, pp. 178-179; SPALLA 2012, p. 433).

Some cemeteries like the grave group in the Merovingian church of Pier-Aquisgrana – considered contemporary with the first wooden phase but with many parts missing due to post interventions relative to the construction of the masonry church – included burials recognised for the quality and attention to detail with which the container was made and the degree of sophistication of all the clothing accessories, in some cases marked by funerary epigraphs designed to celebrate the family group, to enhance the aristocratic component and the feeling of religious devotion. This is the case of Cheldofrida, a Germanic aristocrat, who lived between the end of the 7th century and early 8th century, entombed in the wooden church in a burial in which the sarcophagus was lost, but probably had to have a masonry structure and a monolith cover since in the 10th century when the grave was destroyed – to convert the primitive religious building into a stone church – its funerary tombstone was set into one of the walls of the new place of worship (BÖHMER 1964, p. 675; BÖHME 2008, pp. 30-31).

During the 6th century, in Satigny-Saint-Pierre-aux-Liens, a church was built entirely out of wood (13,50x9,50 m) with a rectangular choir facing east, a vestibule to the west and side annexes, around which a cemetery was continuously used throughout the following century (BONNET 1997, pp. 229-230; pp. 234-235).

CONCLUSIONS

The construction of private oratories on top of Late Roman mausoleums, a very frequent occurrence in the rural parts of the central-western Merovingian alpine area – which corresponds to a just as indicative link between Late Antique mausoleums and funerary basilicas located in the suburbs of the urban areas – cannot be explained as a random succession of buildings without a close tie: older churches were being built in various ways on top of funerary structures with privileged burials belonging to the previous generations already starting in the Late Antique phase (5th-6th century in Ardon and Saint Julien-en-Genevois) and this intensified throughout the 7th century (Mett Biel, Muralto-S. Stefano, Sion-Sous-le-Scex; DE MARCHI 2001; JAGGI 2005, p. 138; GRAENERT 2005a, pp. 126-131). At Sion-Sous-le-Scex a large funerary room (20x11,50 m) dating to the mid 5th century initially was the site of about twenty burials, arranged next to each other and orderly aligned (1st phase). This *coemeterium subteglatum*, that gradually expanded with the construction of a new apse and two square side annexes in the first decades of the 7th century (2nd

phase), was transformed into a cemetery church in which the burials occupied all the inner spaces even if the largest number of burials next to those of the previous phase are concentrated in the nave (fig. 7; STEINER - MOTSCHI 2005, pp. 296-298).

It can be hypothesised that the actions of the Late Roman aristocracies, that continued to use funerary areas even of pagan origin after their conversion to Catholicism, Christianising and converting the places, were shared and even practiced by the same Germanic aristocracies. This superimposition is justified by recognising that the founders wanted to ensure that regular ceremonies would be carried out to commemorate their ancestors, thereby guaranteeing themselves the same physical and spiritual protection (BÖHME 2008, pp. 29-30; KOCH 2011, p. 28; SPALLA 2012, p. 426).

If the conversion of the mausoleums into annexes to the churches refers to what occurred near the rural basilicas, pilgrimage destinations and the decision by the local communities regarding how to use the buildings (Saint-Julienne-en-Genveois-S. Martino), the transformation of mausoleums into small rooms appears instead to be a more 'personal' choice in which the 'family' role of the building is

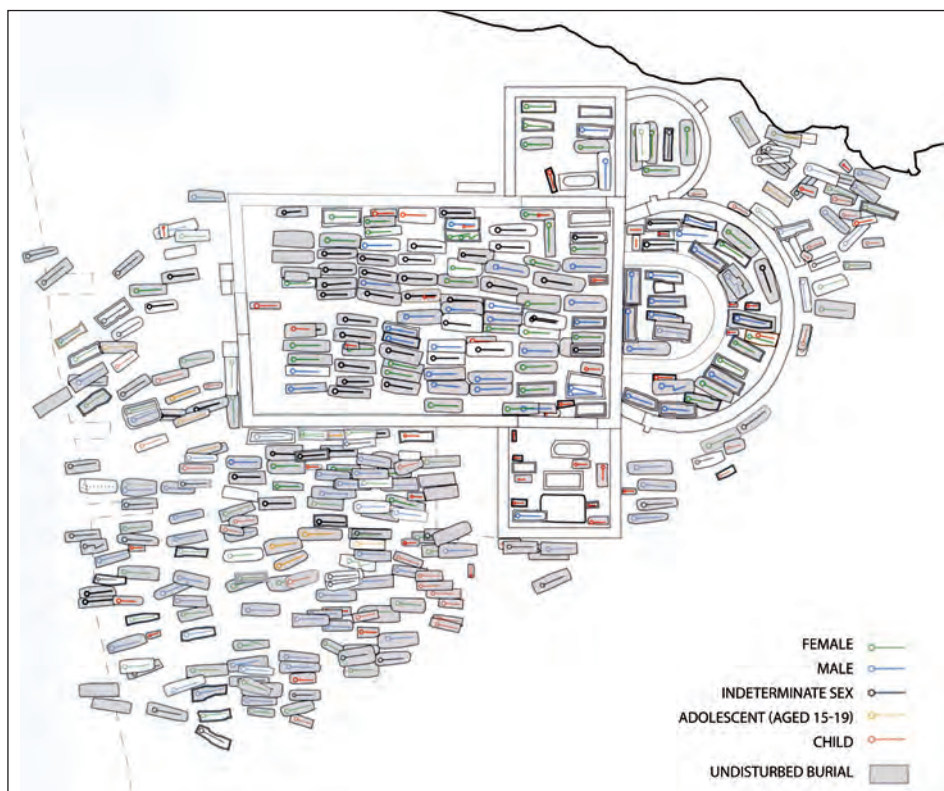


Fig. 7. Sion-Sous-le-Scex, early medieval cemetery church (2nd phase) with distribution of the bodies based on age and gender: 1 female, 2 male, 3 undetermined sex, 4 adolescent (15-19 years of age), 5 child, 6 grave without secondary burial (from STEINER - MOTSCHI 2005, p. 297).

maintained even during the later phases and where the same dimensions of the complexes suggest they were frequented by small groups likely with family ties (Ardon, Muralto-S. Stefano). Finally, the solutions, not often implemented overall, of encompassing the mausoleum either as a presbytery or as a vestibule inside an oratory, would seem to be dictated above all by the desire to respect the devotion demonstrated by the deceased while they were alive: this might have caused the family members to choose for their burials either the position closest to the altars (Mett Biel) or those that demonstrated their humbleness, placing them under the feet of anyone entering the oratory (KRÜGER 1971, p. 182).

Finally, for what concerns the construction of wooden churches, and based on the available archaeological data, we cannot exclude *a priori* that their construction may be part of a project created by the Germanic aristocracies, already underway from the end of the 6th century and continuing into the 7th, to be used as a 'family' mausoleum until the single building was replaced by masonry structures that traced the layout of the previous wooden structures and maintained the funerary function (Sonvico-S. Martino), based on the exact same principle of many complexes in the heart of the Merovingian kingdom (Pier, Oberwil, Brenz, Satigny-Saint Pierre-aux-Liens; DE MARCHI 2001; MEIER 2005, p. 136; ETTTEL 2008, pp. 20-21; SPALLA 2012, pp. 433-434).

ABSTRACT

CHIESE FUNERARIE ALTOMEDIEVALI NELLE AREE ALPINE MEROVINGE CENTRO-OCCIDENTALI: SCELTE STRATEGICHE E IDEOLOGICHE DELL'ARISTOCRAZIA GERMANICA

Le indagini archeologiche nelle chiese funerarie tardoantiche e altomedievali, localizzate sul versante alpino svizzero centro-meridionale, consentono di riconoscere alcuni fattori ricorrenti nella scelta dei siti destinati ad ospitare deposizioni privilegiate, senza dimenticare che la selezione effettuata dal nucleo 'fondatore' germanico dipendeva da variabili collegate a questioni contingenti, a tradizioni proprie del gruppo, oggi non sempre del tutto comprensibili anche attraverso lo studio dei dati materiali. Le aristocrazie germaniche scelsero due tipi di soluzioni attraverso le quali il 'mondo dei vivi' costruì la memoria per il 'mondo dei morti': aree marginali in ampie necropoli aperte oppure riutilizzo di ambienti abbandonati di ville rustiche romane trasformati in chiese funerarie oppure in mausolei, diffusi soprattutto nel V-VI secolo e utilizzati per celebrare riti strettamente privati. Questo sembrerebbe essere il caso di Mett Biel dove la chiesa dedicata a S. Stefano, fu costruita sopra una tomba con camera sepolcrale in legno più antica. La necessità di dotare ogni comunità altomedievale di un luogo di culto, dove cioè si svolgesse la vita religiosa, rese possibile attribuire alle chiese funerarie le prerogative liturgiche, nonostante fosse esplicitamente vietato seppellire nei contesti abitativi. In questo modo, come nel caso della chiesa di Saint-Julien (Ginevra), il rapporto tra la tomba e il suo contenitore si sviluppava in modo diverso poiché la destinazione principale di questi edifici è quella di occuparsi della *cura animarum* e la presenza di sepolture, riconoscibili come quelle del nucleo fondatore e dei suoi parenti più prossimi, diventa un elemento di complementarietà rispetto alla funzione primaria che la chiesa doveva svolgere. Gli stessi dati archeologici indicano come nelle chiese la distribuzione delle tombe non dipenda solo da motivazioni legate alla disponibilità dello spazio deposizionale, ma anche dalla volontà di creare una gerarchizzazione sociale dei singoli gruppi famigliari. Questo determina un quadro più complesso di quanto ipotizzato in passato: le indagini archeologiche hanno verificato come il settore in prossimità dell'altare, quello della navata centrale o le stesse mura perimetrali di questi edifici sono spazi privilegiati riservati alle sepolture del fondatore e della sua famiglia. Per quanto riguarda i materiali da costruzione, legno e pietra dovettero

coesistere in questo periodo, almeno fino al IX secolo, anche perché esiste una difficoltà tangibile nella possibilità di attribuire eventuali sepolture ritrovate in uno spazio interno alla chiesa in legno o a quella successiva in muratura. Il probabile edificio religioso più antico, individuato in S. Ilario di Bioggio (Varese), aveva pareti realizzate con pali infissi nel terreno che delimitavano un perimetro rettangolare, diviso da una palificazione perpendicolare ai perimetrali lignei, a due terzi circa della sua lunghezza, per dividere lo spazio liturgico da quello accessibile ai fedeli. In conclusione quasi tutti gli oratori funerari privati esaminati presentano pochi inumati, indice di famiglie con un limitato numero di componenti, e vengono abbandonati intorno al IX secolo. È possibile che non si tratti di una scelta casuale, ma risponda a una precisa strategia funeraria che prevedeva di seppellire nelle stesse le chiese dove si svolgeva la liturgia cattolica, probabilmente per rispondere al modello organizzativo ecclesiastico voluto dai Carolingi. Nel corso dello stesso IX secolo, è significativo che nuclei di sepolture privilegiate siano collocati in mausolei realizzati a fianco del complesso di culto battesimale. Potrebbe trattarsi del compimento di un processo che aveva visto le classi aristocratiche germaniche, insediate nelle aree rurali, abbandonare i cimiteri, a file o a righe, più antichi, scegliendo la sepoltura nei mausolei e negli oratori cattolici, forse aderendo a un'ideologia funeraria di tradizione romana tardoantica.

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